Competitions were very important in the early days to give visibility to craft artists around the country and to identify emerging talent.
Young Americans was an important competition for craftsmen under 30 years of age. ACEC began it in 1950 and continued it annually for several years. In looking at the catalogs there are many established fiber artists who received early recognition such as – Glen Kaufman, Gerhardt Knodel and Alice Parrott.

Young Americans 1953

Prize Winners’ Wall, “Young Americans 1953,” as exhibited at America House.
Designer Craftsmen USA 1953 was another important American Craftsmen’s Council national competition that premiered at the Brooklyn Museum. It had a large fiber section representing work at that time. It traveled to the Art Institute of Chicago and the San Francisco Museum of Art.
In 1960 ACC held a national competition DESIGNER CRAFTSMEN USA.
Fiber works received the top awards with a silver metal given to a hooked rug by Veda Reed.
Second prize was awarded to Ted Hallman.
In the early 50’s there were other important national competition like FIBER, CLAY and METAL at the St. Paul Gallery and School of Art and many other regional competitions. All of these served an important role in giving visibility to artists work when there was not the network that exists today.
In the mid-50’s Mrs. Webb saw the need for a permanent exhibition center and purchased a brownstone next to the Museum of Modern Art.

When the Museum of Contemporary Crafts opened in the fall of 1956 it became the first museum in the US to focus on work in the craft media with continuing exhibitions and educational programs. During the first twenty-five years over 50 one-person, thematic and group exhibitions related to some aspect of fiber.
The Museum of Contemporary Crafts had many small one person shows that gave visibility to new work before commercial galleries emerged in the early seventies.
The Museum of Contemporary Crafts’ exhibitions program illustrated the evolution of new forms of fiber art in the early years. In the late sixties there were several other museums around the country that presented fiber exhibitions. Also, there were important international events such as the Lausanne Biennials and the Triennials in Milan that gave global visibility to new fiber art. The Museum of Contemporary Crafts exhibitions program illustrated the evolution of fiber art in America.
When the MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY CRAFTS opened in the fall of 1956 the first exhibition was “Craftsmanship in Changing World” organized by Thomas Tibbs the Museum’s inaugural director.

Fiber art was well represented with work by thirty-two fiber artists including Lea Miller, Anni Albers, Reuben Eshkanian, Mark Adams, Ed Rossbach, and Dorothy Liebes.
CRAFTSMANSHIP IN A CHANGING WORLD (Above, work by Lenore Tawney)

During the first few years, Director Thomas Tibbs established MCC as a professional museum and began modest program in collecting that included fiber works.
In 1959 FIBER, TOOLS and WEAVES was created as an educational exhibit designed to travel with the advice of New York weaver, Lili Blumenau. Forty-two weavers and designers were represented along with an educational component.
From the beginning the Museum of Contemporary Crafts was international in scope – In 1959 CONTEMPORARY FRENCH TAPESTRIES presented work by members of the French Tapestry Association. It included the work of Le Corbusier.
Mariska Karasz was important in bringing new concepts to traditional embroidery. Her work became nationally known through articles featured in House Beautiful and other home magazines. In 1951 she had a show at the Art Institute of Chicago.

An artist realizes brilliant new expressions through filamental forms
In 1961 a memorial exhibition of Mariska Karasz was presented. Mariska immigrated from Hungary in 1913.
The 1960’s was a very exciting era with a return to basics, and a time of seeking new ways of living motivated by young people seeking a new lifestyle. It resulted in a cultural change where anything was possible.

In 1963, it was a challenge to present exhibitions that would give credibility to an area of the arts that had limited national exposure at the time. As a specialized museum being next to Museum of Modern Art, it was a great advantage and the freedom to develop the program allowed staff to respond to what was happening. Most of the exhibitions in the early days of the museum served the purpose of reporting on new work and trends.
WOVEN FORMS in 1963 was the first major show at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts to feature new directions in fiber art in America.
The title and concept was inspired by Lenore Tawney. Her innovative work in the mid-50s broke from tradition and was revolutionary as she produced sculptural forms that were very unique not only in America but in the world.
Lenore Tawney's work was featured on the main floor of the MCC.
WOVEN FORMS included work by Shiela Hicks, Claire Zeisler, Alice Adams and Dorian Zachai that were presented in the upper gallery. This exhibition brought national and international attention to new fiber art in America. Erica Billitier, a curator from Switzerland, saw it and created a smaller show at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Zurich the following year giving exposure of new American fiber to a European audience.